

Kagawa Katsuhiko

Japanese craftsmanship has long been known for its exquisite attention to detail. Regardless of the type of craft, all craftsmen adhere to the spirit of “一生懸命 (issshokenmei)”, meaning to dedicate one’s life to mastering a craft.

Kagawa Katsuhiko (1853-1917), born in Edo (modern-day Tokyo), was an active goldsmith specialising in gold sculptures during the Meiji period (1868-1912). His father was a fishmonger from Ōmi province who later moved to Tokyo; and his mother was the daughter of a sword merchant. Even though he was not born to a particularly artistic family, he learned various crafts from famous craftsmen at a young age. Kagawa learned painting from Shibata Zenshin (1807-1891), an active lacquer artist and painter; and at the age of twelve, he apprenticed under the Nō mask¹ carver Ariyoshi Yoshinaga (n.d) to learn woodworking techniques. Moreover, he studied metalworking techniques under Nomura Katsumori (1835-1917), a disciple of Kano Natsuo (1828-1898), and entered Tokyo art school with Unno Shomin (1844-1915) in 1898 with the goal of becoming a goldsmith. Together, they became Kano Natsuo’s protégés. Finally, Kagawa was appointed by as an Imperial Household Artist on the 4th April 1906.

Kagawa inherited the technique and style of Kano Natsuo’s metalworking craftsmanship – a style oriented towards the nobles and aristocrats, also known as the imperial household style – which became Kagawa's specialty. In particular, he excelled at using expensive materials with the katakiribori decorative techniques which was popular in the Edo Period. The technique uses a square chisel, held at an angle, to imitate the strength and angle of the brush in calligraphy, presenting a combination of both soft curved and strong rigid lines to create beautiful shapes.

¹ Nō / ‘Noh’ (のう) is a form of classical Japanese dance drama performed since the 14th century. Apart from requiring highly trained actors and musicians, special costumes and props, every actor is required to wear an iconic mask corresponding to the role they represent. This mask is named ‘Nō-men’ (能面) and craftsmen who crafted ‘Nō-men’ called a Nō mask carver or ‘Nō-men shi’.

Kagawa Katsuhiko 香川勝廣



Figure 1. Silver vase, Japan, Maker: Kagawa Katsuhiko, Meiji period (1868-1912), Silver and wood, Height 34.5 x Diameter 17cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 2. Silver vase (close up)

Kagawa Katsuhiko 香川勝廣

This silver vase (fig. 1) by Kagawa Katsuhiko forms part of the Japanese collection in Liang Yi Museum. The silver vase is decorated with the theme of pine trees executed with simple lines – some thicker and some lighter – to create a sense of layering and texture. The shape of the pine trees is depicted in only a few strokes, and the meticulous shadow carving makes the whole picture more vivid.



Figure 3. Rau-Kiseru, Japan, Maker: Kagawa Katsuhiko, Meiji period (1868-1912), Ivory, shakudō and gold, Length 19.7cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 4. Maker's mark (Katsuhiko sei)

Kagawa Katsuhiro 香川勝廣



Figure 5. Rau-Kiseru, Japan, Maker: Kagawa Katsuhiro, Meiji period (1868-1912), Shibuichi, shakudō, silver and copper, Length 19.3cm, Liang Yi Museum Collection.



Figure 6. Rau-Kiseru (Close up)



Figure 7. Maker's mark

In addition to the vase, the museum is also home to two kiseru pipes by Kagawa. Kiseru pipes are usually divided into three sections: the shank where the bowl is used to hold the tobacco, the mouthpiece where the lip meets the pipe, and the stem which connects the two parts. The shank and mouthpiece are usually made of metal such as brass, and the stem is commonly known as rau. The most common material used for the rau is a type of bamboo from the rau county (modern day Laos). From the images (fig. 3 and fig. 4), we can see that kiserus by Kagawa Katsuhiko uses two main materials. The materials used for the mouthpiece and shank are shakudo and gold, using his masterful skills to carve a rooster and bamboo, creating realistic images. Paired with ivory as the rau material, the kiseru is elegant and refined but understated.

The other kiseru (fig. 5) has a mouthpiece and shank made from brass, shakudo, gold and silver, decorated with the sparrow and Adonis flower. The stem is made from bamboo. Both kiseru pipes use three metal carving techniques, including the katagiri-bori, hira-zougan and kintsugi technique. The image below (fig. 8) of 'panel view of Wakanoura' was once displayed at the 1900 Paris Exposition, and is one of the best examples showcasing Kagawa's superb metal carving skills. It is currently a permanent collection of the Museum of the Imperial Collection, under the jurisdiction of Japan's Imperial Household Agency.



Figure 8. Panel view of Wakanoura, Japan, Maker: Kagawa Katsuhiro, 1899, Shibuichi metal and ivory inlays, Museum of the Imperial Collections.

Kagawa Katsuhiro, who dedicated his life to the art of metalworking, and creating exquisite works for the Imperial family, died at the age of 65. At present, there are not many works that have been handed down. Most of the representative works by Kagawa Katsuhiro are collected by the Imperial Household Agency, the Tokyo National Museum and other Japanese institutions.

He was one of the 79 artists appointed as Imperial Household Artist between 1890 and 1944, and had participated in international exhibitions including the Paris Exposition Universelle held in 1900. His legacy was succeeded by his second son, Katsukiyo Katsuhiro (1894-1967).

Kagawa Katsuhiko 香川勝廣

Bibliography

深澤希望, Nō Masks, The Nohgaku Performers' Association, Last modified (n.d.).
<https://www.nohgaku.or.jp/en/guide/nō-masks>

余鶴清, 日本美術發展史, Taiwan, The Commercial Press, Ltd., 2004.

The Asahi Shimbun, 朝日日本歴史人物事典, Japan, 1994

宮内廳, 明治の彫金- 海野勝珉とその周辺 (三の丸尚蔵館展覧会図録 No.41),
p.44-45, Japan, 2006

宮内廳, 皇室技芸員と一九〇〇年パリ万国博覧会 (三の丸尚蔵館展覧会図録
No.47), p.32-33, Japan, 2008

Markus Sesko, The Japanese toso-kinko Schools, p.271, Japan, 2012